

State Commission

The Oregon Volunteers Commission for Voluntary Action and Service manages 11 AmeriCorps programs with more than 329 AmeriCorps members serving 25 counties. AmeriCorps members address critical needs in the areas of education, health, environment, economic opportunity, disaster services, and nonprofit capacity building. Intermediary organizations play a strong role in providing AmeriCorps service opportunities to communities of all sizes and in all geographic areas of the state. Through this strong intermediary network, more than 10,500 students were involved in school-based and out-of-school learning as a result of AmeriCorps member efforts in 2014-15. Ten percent of those students received music instruction in some of Oregon's most remote rural communities through one of the nation's only rural music education AmeriCorps programs. In addition, Oregon Volunteers serves as the coordinating agency for state and federal funds appropriated for Court Appointed Special Advocate programs through the state. Other programs include the annual Governor's Volunteer Awards, volunteer engagement capacity building, and promotion of civic engagement.

AmeriCorps State

Heart of Oregon AmeriCorps members prepare for employment and post-secondary opportunities with a model that pairs classroom learning in career planning and environmental education with hands-on field experience. One two-term female member had no job and no plans for college when she joined. In her words, "I just sort of lost interest in doing anything, ever." She did not have the guidance, opportunity or drive to step into the world. She shares, "Some people can take huge steps straight into college; straight into the workforce; and that wasn't something I was ready for yet." The only female on a rural crew of eight, she was intimidated and overwhelmed by running a chainsaw or working remotely to build trails. Through support from staff and fellow crew members, she began to experience her untapped potential. By the end of her term, she was able to do the work as well as teach and assist new members. She became a role model for newer young women joining the crews. "I've figured out through this program that I can really push myself. The program has changed my life, made me a lot more motivated, and is exactly what I needed." She is now completing prerequisites for a degree in biology.

To strengthen environmental education and career opportunities for underserved populations, Confluence Environmental Center places AmeriCorps members in Portland metro area organizations. One member helped Tryon Creek Watershed Council (TCWC) coordinate a group trip for 20 refugee teenagers from the School Assistance for Refugee Newcomers program. The students were from many countries in the Americas, Africa, and Asia including Congo, Nepal, and Somalia. TCWC took the students on a guided hike to Tryon Creek where they learned about plant identification, animal adaptation, and watershed issues. For many, it was their first time in a forest. They enjoyed seeing the tall Douglas fir and cedar trees. The group then volunteered in the native plant nursery to help pot bare-root plants used for restoration. The students enjoyed learning how to pot plants and seeing the slugs and worms in the soil. The trip was a great experience for the group to learn about watershed issues and for TCWC to learn about the students' experiences and cultures. One of the day's highlights was the group learning how to say "tree" in every represented native language.

AmeriCorps National

College Possible Portland, which serves 1,700 students, is closing Oregon's degree divide and building a competitive workforce for the future. By 2020, 70 percent of jobs in the state will require a post-secondary education, but only eight percent of low-income students nationally earn a college degree by age 24. College Possible Portland's AmeriCorps coaches guide low-income students through all aspects of preparing for, applying to, and enrolling in college and support students all the way through college graduation. Students who are guided by College Possible AmeriCorps members have a 98 percent college admission rate and are 10 times more likely to graduate from college than their low-income peers. A 2013 Harvard randomized controlled trial found that students in College Possible's AmeriCorps-based program model had a significant positive increase in four-year college enrollment. By harnessing the power of national service, College Possible creates better futures for all Oregonians.

Central Oregon Youth Conservation Corps, the summer program of Heart of Oregon Corps, has 73 youth in 15 crews serving across Deschutes, Jefferson, Crook and Klamath Counties. The 15th crew arose from a partnership with the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, and was made up entirely of Warm Springs Reservation residents. The partnership strengthened the economy in one of the poorest areas in Jefferson County, and offered an AmeriCorps education award to three of the Warm Springs crew members. Two of those crew members were high school dropouts and are now both working to complete their high school diplomas in anticipation of using the awards for their post-secondary education. The Corps was also pleased that, with assistance through Oregon Volunteers, the Corps was able to secure accommodation for a fully deaf Warm Springs member.

FoodCorps has 10 AmeriCorps members serving in Ashland, Corvallis, Eugene, North Powder, Portland, and Salem. FoodCorps is a nationwide team of AmeriCorps leaders who work under the direction of local partner organizations to connect children to real food and help them grow up healthy. They teach children hands-on lessons about food and nutrition build and tend school gardens, teach cooking lessons, and help change what's on lunch trays so that children can eat healthy food from local farms. In the past year, the FoodCorps members in Oregon served 14,476 children, built or brought back into use 17 school and community gardens, harvested 2,572 pounds of produce, and recruited 608 community volunteers.

Jesuit Volunteer Corps Northwest AmeriCorps member Katherine served this past year at Catholic Charities of Oregon. Catholic Charities Refugee Resettlement Program is a central place of refuge and assistance in Portland for families who have left their homelands because of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, and/or political opinions. Katherine saw that it would be important for the program to have a cultural orientation curriculum readily available to serve the ever-growing refugee population that needed services in the community. She researched and created a guide for staff, volunteers, and/or guest speakers to easily facilitate one of the cultural orientation classes for new refugees. She organized existing materials in a central location; created updated, detailed lesson plans for each class; and added resources to deepen the cultural orientation curriculum. The guide includes a list of each person/organization with whom they partner in these classes and has made the agency's cultural orientation curriculum more effective and efficient.

Mt. Adams Institute VetsWork AmeriCorps members serve with public lands management and natural resource agencies to meet land improvement needs that would otherwise be unmet. AmeriCorps members maintain trails, clear non-native invasive species, maintain recreation areas, engage volunteers, do technical writing, and evaluate and document archeological sites. In Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, Umatilla National Forest, Mt. Hood National Forest, and Fremont-Winema National Forest, 18 VetsWork AmeriCorps members gave 16,119 hours of service, reduced fuel on 48 acres, maintained 204 miles of trail, and maintained or assessed 424 facilities. The members inventoried 1,042 acres for cultural resources and documented 60 cultural resource sites. They taught 3,499 students for a total of 6,424 hours of instruction, and had 703 visitor contacts.

One Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) Corps AmeriCorps member served this past year at Lines for Life in Portland. YMHFA is a certification course that introduces participants to risk factors and warning signs of adolescent mental health problems, focuses on the importance of early intervention, and teaches how to help adolescents who are in crisis or having a mental health or substance use challenge. The AmeriCorps member, who is a trained YMHFA instructor, certified 122 community members in the program. A three month follow-up survey revealed that YMHFA strategies helped 651 adolescents who struggle with a mental health challenge or illness.

Youth Volunteer Corps has two AmeriCorps members who serve Corvallis and Portland. Last year, the AmeriCorps member in Corvallis engaged 214 youth, including 17 disadvantaged youth, in 3,882 hours of service. They served in 105 projects for 32 local agencies, including Oregon State Parks, Majestic Theatre, and Safe Haven. The program in Portland launched in August of 2015 and is primarily focused on establishing the program in the community, so that it can engage youth – especially disadvantaged youth – in service to local agencies. These efforts will strengthen both the youth and the local agencies.

AmeriCorps VISTA

Karen Fryefield, an AmeriCorps VISTA member with Mercy Corps North West assigned to the Reentry Transition Center (RTC), applied for her site to be selected as the 2015 Unitarian Universalist Convention local service project. It was selected, and, as a result, the RTC received \$67,000 in program funds. The program currently serves more than 1,000 people every year and these funds will provide a great benefit to those clients. In 2013, the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission conducted an evaluation of the RTC as part of a pilot project of three transition centers in Oregon. It found that the RTC has reduced re-arrests of its participants by 31 percent, which created a \$14 savings in direct costs to the public safety system for every \$1 invested in the project.

AmeriCorps VISTA member Amanda Shore, serving with the Oregon Campus Compact VISTA Project at the City Club of Portland, wrote and received a \$45,000 grant from the Collins Foundation to cover the transportation costs of the Civic Scholars Program for three years. She also received \$2,500 from the Multnomah Bar Foundation to support a graduation for the first-ever class of Civic Scholar participants. Amanda was awarded \$10,000 from the Oregon Community Foundation to help cover ongoing costs of the Civic Scholars Program. This newly implemented program aims to increase student engagement and build leadership skills among youth from underserved high schools.

AmeriCorps NCCC

Deer Creek Center for Scientific Research and Education (DCC) is the home to the Siskiyou Field Institute and has a dual mission “to promote scientific research and to conduct educational programs to deepen people’s scientific understanding and intimate connection to the Klamath-Siskiyou bioregion.” DCC has a stream onsite that flows into Deer Creek, a major tributary of the Illinois River. The stream is in danger of causing pollution and its banks are being eroded by grazing cattle. The area also suffers non-native vegetation causing damage to the native vegetation. An AmeriCorps NCCC team was requested to support the center’s efforts. During their deployment, members maintained two miles of trails, designed and constructed 550 feet of an irrigation system, removed an acre of invasive species, and assisted in teaching environmental education classes. The community of Josephine County, as well as field biologists from around the country, now have access to improved resources that better allow them to broaden their understanding of the unique natural area that is the Siskiyou National Forest.

The United Community Action Network (UCAN) is a community action agency serving Douglas and Josephine counties in Oregon. Its mission is to create solutions to poverty, thus improving lives in the community. UCAN has administered a variety of anti-poverty programs for 46 years, including one focused on affordable housing. These programs are desperately needed in the region as 17.8 percent of residents live in poverty. In the summer of 2015, an AmeriCorps NCCC team supported UCAN's efforts in the Rosenberg area. The team painted six homes, which protected these dwellings from the harsh effects of inclement weather. Five of these structures housed approximately 15 families. The Casa de Belen Homeless Shelter is the sixth site the team served, which houses approximately 35 residents. One hundred twenty pounds of unwanted brush, including blackberries and overgrown ornamental trees, were removed from two acres to beautify the properties. The team also provided maintenance to eight acres of property such as mulching, weeding, and repainting curbs. Members also weeded and tended to the community garden at two additional sites.

Senior Corps Foster Grandparent Program

The Foster Grandparent Program serving Multnomah, Clackamas, and Washington counties in Oregon is proud to share a partnership with Bridge Meadows, an intentional, inter-generational housing community comprised of families who are adopting children out of the foster care system and elders who volunteer their time with the families. Currently, six elders also serve as Foster Grandparent Program volunteers. An example highlighting this benefit: a Foster Grandparent started providing ongoing, daily academic support to two kids in the community. They had not gone to school before and had no prior guidance around education – they are now excelling at grade level and are excited about learning. The Foster Grandparents also provide invaluable support to the kids in helping build their self-esteem and confidence through their consistent presence in the kids' lives. Bridge Meadows currently has 19 children, all of whom benefit from the Foster Grandparent Program elders who positively impact their lives every day.

Senior Corps RSVP

United Community Action Network (UCAN) in Grants Pass, Oregon, started a RSVP VET Team this year. For the last six months, veteran volunteers, Craig Pear and Alan Crews have been accompanying a UCAN case worker on his visits with veterans who are either homeless or in imminent danger of becoming homeless. Alan and Craig have since helped 19 veterans with job searches, housing searches, and transportation needs. Six veteran families have been permanently housed thanks to these efforts and UCAN has seen an increased appointment attendance rate since Craig and Alan started to provide veteran families with additional support. This program will be replicated by an RSVP project in an adjoining county in the coming months. One client's testimony credits volunteer Craig for his improved situation: "I am a homeless veteran who saw combat in Afghanistan. In the past I didn't feel like people cared or were too busy to listen to me and I was too proud to let myself get help. At my first meeting with my case manager I was introduced to a fellow veteran. I felt like having Craig in the meeting showed UCAN was really concerned enough to get people who understood and can help."

Senior Corps Senior Companion Program

Clackamas County Social Services Senior Companion Program and the Care Oregon Give2Get Program are developing a pilot project to incorporate the Senior Companion Program into the pool of Care Oregon members in Clackamas County. The plan is to use the Care Oregon marketing resources to recruit a pool of up to 20 Senior Companions from within the Care Oregon membership. The application, screening, and training will be provided by Clackamas County Senior Companion Program. Clients for the program will also be recruited from the Care Oregon membership. The goal is to recruit and train companions during the summer of 2015 and begin serving clients in the fall. Pre and post surveys will be completed by all participants, both companions and clients, to measure program impact.

Social Innovation Fund

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF) transforms lives by using evidence to find what works and make it work for more people. The SIF Classic and SIF Pay for Success programs harness the expertise of grantmaking intermediaries to identify, evaluate and expand effective nonprofits serving low-income communities across America. The SIF programs in Oregon are focused primarily on youth development, with special attention to educational attainment, youth involved in the foster care system and reduced justice system involvement. The Social Innovation Fund is investing \$200,000 and expanding the impact of four nonprofits in Oregon.